

# 2002 Regular Session –

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## **LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY REPORT**

This report provides a comprehensive overview and commentary on legislative activities pertinent to the AAAC's Legislative Agenda for the 2002 Legislative Session. The AAAC provided testimony on all publicly heard bills, outlined in its agenda either orally or in written form. In addition, we monitored all legislation that could have an impact on the African-American community.

Unfortunately, the lagging state economy and budget cuts aborted the passage of many legislative initiatives. However AAAC along with its partners and alliances intends on continuing to advocate in the next Legislative Session for those issues and programs that would improve and maintain the viability of our community.

## ENVIRONMENT

- **Public Act 02-64 - (HB) 5209** – *An act to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions at power plants.*

AAAC was successful in its support of HB 5209. In essence this act limits the use of emissions trading as a way of meeting Department of Environmental regulations. It also enforces certain power plants, popularly known as the Sooty Six, to comply with guidelines set by the Clean Air Act of 1977. The passage of HB 5209 chronicles an important threshold in the campaign for cleaner air in urban communities in the state. The act takes effect as of January 1, 2005.

**Result – PASSED.**

**In partnership with Connecticut Coalition for Environmental Justice a group of environmental advocates the AAAC supported:**

- **(SB) 54** – *An act establishing an environmental justice task force*

**Result – Failed.**

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

**In partnership with the Working Group on Prison Issues (WGPI) a diverse advocacy group committed to prison reform, AAAC supported the following:**

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- **(HB) 5672** *An act in support of: A Pilot Program For A Debit System For Telephone Calls From A Correctional Facility*

The bill requires the Corrections Commissioner to establish a pilot program to give inmates at one corrections unit the option of paying for phone service using a debit or a similar system instead of calling collect, with inmates paying for calls using money deposited in their accounts for that purpose. The Commissioner must (1) post a notice to advise inmates and families of the option and (2) in consultation with the state's chief information officer,

make an effort to establish the pilot program within a year after the bill's effective date.

**Result – PASSED**

- **SB) 456** – *An act concerning employment protection for crime victims and persons who's criminal records have been erased.*

AAAC was part of a coalition of advocacy groups under the leadership and direction of Chair of the Appropriations Committee Rep. Bill Dyson addressing issues ex-inmates face re-entering society. Items of discussion included the following: arrest/conviction questions on employment applications, criminal record erasure, and a proposal regarding explanation of pardons. The group was successful in making amendments to SB-456 by incorporating language that would prohibit private employers from discriminating against individuals with criminal records.

**Result – PASSED.**

- **(HB) 5695** *An act for support services for persons in recovery from substance abuse*

**Result – Failed**

- **(HB) 5516** *An act concerning alternatives to incarceration for persons with psychiatric disabilities*

**Result – Failed**

- **HB) 5690** – *An act concerning prison and jail overcrowding.*

This hallmark legislation formed the basis from which various strategies could be implemented to address the overcrowding of correctional facilities. The bill failed to make it out of the Judiciary Committee, however specific

language was incorporated into (SB) 5760 - An act to address changes in the juvenile justice system.

**Result – Failed**

- **(SB) 5760** – *An act to address the changes to the juvenile justice system.*

AAAC supported this legislation in the anticipation that disparities within the juvenile justice system would be examined and corrected. This clearly was one of AAAC's priority legislative initiatives, considering that a large proportion of young African-American males are embroiled in the criminal justice system. The objective was to improve Connecticut's system of juvenile justice by reducing incarceration for non-dangerous youth and improving community based alternatives for serving children and families. Senator Coleman Co-Chair of the Judiciary SB-5760 stated that this bill would need some minor revisions to ensure its passage in the 2003 legislative session.

**Result – Failed.**

- **(HB) 5682** – *An act concerning the composition of the commission on prison and jail overcrowding.*

AAAC collaborated with the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), and the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC) in support of this legislation. This was an important piece of legislation to the aforementioned Commissions, in view of the fact that the current composition of the Prison Overcrowding Commission lacks minority representation. Approved by the Select Committee on General Administrations (GAE), the bill was reported to the legislative commissioners office for further action, but nothing materialized.

**Result – Failed.**

- **(HB) 5746** - *An act concerning mandatory employment and education for inmates.*

This legislation would have required convicted felons to work for forty-eight hours per week, study for twelve hours per week and pass random drug tests. Due to budget concerns no action was taken in the Judiciary Committee to support this initiative. Clearly education or the lack thereof is one of the factors determining the rate of recidivism particularly within the African-American community and the AAAC will continue its legislative efforts in support of preventive programs.

**Result – Failed.**

## **EDUCATION**

- **House Bill (HB) 5496** – *An act concerning early childhood education and teachers' retirement.*

AAAC supported this piece of legislation as one of its education initiatives, in light of the disparity in standardized test scores between urban and suburban students. It originally started out as *An act concerning school readiness*. This bill would have:

1. starting July 1, 2004, gradually reduced, from 35 to 32, the number of years a public school teacher must work to retire with the most favorable retirement benefit formula under the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS)
2. liberalized earning limits for retired teachers who return to the classroom temporarily, and
3. allowed retired teachers to earn more than the limit while continuing to collect retirement benefits for up to two years if they are reemployed in shortage areas or other necessary positions identified by the education commissioner

After several amendments to the bill the final version still focused on strengthening school readiness and reading program, however it was tabled on the calendar of the senate for further action that did not happen.

**Result – Failed**

- **Senate Bill (SB) 44** – *Programs to address the teacher and school administrator shortage.*

This bill would have implemented a number of recommendations and additions set by an 18 member Commission charged to address the problem of teacher shortage and retention. The main rationale behind some of the more recent additions was to allow retired teachers to return to the teaching profession and also allow reciprocity with other states. AAAC supported the teacher shortage initiatives anticipating that more teachers/administrators of African-American descent would be hired.

#### **Result – Failed**

- **(SB) 41** – *The minority teacher incentive program.*

SB 41 would have expanded the minority teacher incentive program to include not only minority students interested in becoming teachers but also minorities interested in pursuing careers in student support services, e.g. nursing, psychology etc. The bill failed to make it out of the education committee. Opponents of this legislation, primarily the Department of Higher Education, claim more funding would be needed to implement such a program. The 18 member Commission recommended that the state expand the program to help another 50 students. This initiative would have required an additional appropriation of five hundred thousand dollars in fiscal year 02 for a total of one million dollars, AAAC supported the Commission's new proposal but it died in the Education Committee as a result of no action.

#### **Result – Failed**

- **(HB) 5334** – *An act concerning full compliance with the Sheff vs. O'Neill ruling*

This bill would have required the state to comply fully with the Sheff vs. O'Neill court decision. AAAC supported HB 5334 realizing little had been achieved in terms of racial integration in Hartford public schools since the state mandated schools to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation using a variety of methods. Waiting lists continue to grow for the Interdistrict Magnet School and the Project Choice Program needs more improvement and expansion. This bill was introduced by the Hartford delegation including but not limited to the following: Rep. Marie Lopez Kirkley-Bey (D-Hartford), Sen. Eric D. Coleman (D-Hartford), Sen. John W. Fonfara (D-Hartford), Rep.

Barnaby Horton (D-Hartford), and Rep. Kenneth P. Green (D-Hartford). The bill was referred to the Education Committee but the Committee never even raised it for a public hearing.

**Result – Failed.**

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**In partnership with One Connecticut a diverse advocacy group committed to addressing poverty issues, AAAC supported the following:**

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- **Public Act 02-33 - (HB) 5057** – *An act increasing the minimum wage*

AAAC was successful in its support of HB-5057 An act to increase the state's minimum fair wage to seven dollars per hour effective January 1, 2003, and to require the state minimum fair wage to annually increase, beginning July 1, 2004, by either (1) the amount of inflation measured by the annual All Urban Wage Earners Consumer Price Index for the preceding year ending May thirty-first, or (2) 0.5% above the federal minimum wage, whichever is greater.

**Result – PASSED.**

- **Public Act 02-54-(HB) 02-54** –*An act concerning the self-sufficiency measurement for the state of Connecticut.*

This law requires the self-sufficiency measurement to be updated by the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, within existing budgetary resources, on January 1, 2003 and every three years thereafter. It also requires the Office of Workforce Competitiveness to distribute the self-sufficiency measurement to all state agencies that provide services and counseling to people seeking education, job training and employment.

**Result – PASSED**

- **(HB) 5479** – *One-stop centers.*

AAAC supported this workforce development initiative recognizing that the changes to welfare will have no hope of success unless individuals received the appropriate education and training. One-stop centers are designed to provide comprehensive employment and training for the following: school dropouts, dislocated workers, welfare-to-work participants etc. The bill required the Department of Labor (DOL) in consultation with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC) and within available appropriations, to survey a sample of employers by January 1, 2003, to gauge their awareness and use of one-stop centers.

**Result – Failed.**

- **(SB) 322** – *A state funded work-study program for TANF recipients.*

This piece of legislation would have established and operated a work-study program for recipients under the temporary assistance for needy families (TANF) program. The program would have provided a continuum of services including but not limited to case management, transportation assistance etc. A key feature of this legislation required Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide childcare services to individuals participating in this program. AAAC supported (SB) 322. The Labor Committee approved (SB) 322. It was ultimately reported out of the House and Senate to the Committee on Appropriations for further action where it died.

**Result – Failed.**

- **(HB) 5482** – *An act concerning community based job-training initiatives.*

The bill required the Department of Labor (DOL), within available appropriations to provide funds to community based job-training programs designed to assist unemployed or underemployed individuals enter nontraditional occupations. Originally \$800,000 in funding was appropriated, \$350,000 for non-traditional occupations and \$450,000 for displaced homemakers in the Governor's budget, which was vetoed. Technically the Workforce Development Committee took no action. However the legislature



still instructed Department of Labor to carry out the mandates outlined in the program in the absence of funding. The department is expected to provide these funds within its available resources.

**Result – Failed.**

- **(SB) 323** – *A higher education economic competitiveness grant program.*

AAAC supported this grant program, however the Workforce Development Committee failed to take action on SB-323. The rationale behind the program was to offer grants to business, industry and educational institutions in specific academic areas that have a positive impact on the state's economy.

**Result – Failed.**

**BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- **(HB) 5401** – *An act establishing a revolving loan fund for initiation of projects in the urban and industrial site reinvestment program(USRP).*

The revolving loan fund provides developers with an incentive to invest in environmentally contaminated lands by offering money up front instead of having investors wait for three years to claim business tax credits. This money is expected to jump start the commencement of projects or at least the environmental remediation process, which was previously stalled due to lack of enthusiasm on the part of investors. AAAC supported this initiative. It is difficult to measure the benefits of the USRP program in urban communities and AAAC will examine newer legislative proposals with respect to economic development.

**Result – Failed.**

- **(HB) 5598** - *An act concerning a task force to study micro enterprises.*

AAAC collaborated with the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission (LPRAC) in delivering testimony on this legislation. The definition of small business, as defined in state statute for participation in the small business set-aside program, is a business that has annual revenues of less than \$10 million dollars. Other programs define small business as having 50 employees or fewer. Many minority business owners believe these thresholds are too high and that the definition should be reviewed to consider much smaller “micro-enterprises”.

**Result – Failed.**

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## **OTHER BILLS MONITORED BY THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION**

### **CIVIL RIGHTS & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

HB 5699 – An act concerning voting reform

HB 5700 – An act concerning Election Day registration

SB 562 – An act concerning an address confidentiality program

### **EDUCATION**

HB 5336 – An act concerning the creation of additional magnet schools and the elimination of racial and economic isolation.

### **CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

SB 589 – An act concerning the illegal sale or possession with intent to sell of cocaine

SB 541 – An act concerning discharge plans for persons leaving state funded programs

SB 414 – An act concerning special education services for children in the juvenile justice system

SB 568 – An act appropriating funds for programs for juveniles concerning domestic violence

HB 5461 – An act concerning expedited erasure of certain criminal records

HB 5691 – An act concerning drug treatment programs at alternative incarceration centers

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

SB 121 – An act extending unemployment compensation benefits

HB 5131 – An act concerning the earned income tax credit

HB 5693 – An act concerning the definition of a crime victim

### **BUSINESS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

SB 497 – An act concerning certain minority set-aside provisions

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